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## THE APOSTLES' CREED REVISED BY THE TEACHING OF JESUS.

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A CHRISTIAN ought to have no hesitation in bringing any creed or doctrine of the church up to the test of the teaching of Jesus. For that is the standard and that alone. The Christian revelation was completed when Jesus ascended on high. He sent his disciples forth to *witness* of him, not to make new revelations (Luke 24:48; Acts 1:8). To the end of the age they were to teach the things which he had commanded them (Matt. 28:20). It was he and no one else who fulfilled the law and the prophets (Matt. 5:17). It was he and no one else who knew the Father (Matt. 11:27). He said that he had made known the name of the Father, and we may not affirm that he left anything in that name which he did not make known (John 17:6). He declared to his disciples *all* things which he had heard from the Father (John 15:15). He *finished* the work which the Father gave him to do (John 17:4). He promised that his Spirit should continue his work, but by unfolding and applying the revelation which he had made, not by making new revelations (John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7-11). He said that the Holy Spirit would glorify him because he would take of his revelation and show it to the disciples (John 16:14). He would bring to their mind what Jesus had said, and lead them into an understanding of it. Words spoken by Jesus and but imperfectly understood were to become plain under the tuition of the Spirit, and the disciples would then see their application to daily life.

There ought to be no question on this point. To say that Jesus left his revelation incomplete, and that he expected his disciples to complete it, is to ignore his plain words.

By the standard, then, of the teaching of Jesus as contained in the gospels, which of all New Testament writings describe his life and record his words, every doctrine of men, as well as each individual life, ought to be tested. And there is a special fitness in subjecting the Apostles' Creed to this test, because, by virtue of its great age and its ritualistic use in many churches, it has an immense influence. There are, doubtless, many persons who suppose that it is inspired, as there are many who are naturally misled by the title into the belief that it was really composed by the apostles. A brief statement of its history may, therefore, appropriately precede a study of it in the light of the teaching of Jesus.

The Apostles' Creed was produced in the western or Latin church, and was a gradual growth. We find its outlines at the beginning of the third century in the creeds of Irenæus and Tertullian, and five hundred years later we find the present form of the creed recognized everywhere in the western church. For centuries there was not one uniform version of the creed, but varying versions of it were in use in different churches. The form adopted by the church in Rome at last supplanted all others, and this has survived to the present day. Thus it appears that the name of this venerable statement of faith is a misnomer. Parts of it originated as far from the time of the apostles as we are from the days of Queen Elizabeth, or even from the days of King John. It is, of course, a misfortune that it sails thus under false colors, and that it seems to have an authority which it cannot rightfully claim. If there were any power on earth that could break the tradition regarding this document, it would be a forward step to rechristen it simply as "An Early Creed."

A revision of this creed by the teaching of Jesus calls for some omissions and more additions, that is to say, it calls for these alterations if it is to be in any adequate sense of the terms "the rule of faith," a short statement of the essentials of Christian belief.

First, the omissions. I think there should be three of these, viz., the article regarding the conception and birth of Jesus, the

article regarding his coming to judge the quick and the dead, and the article regarding the resurrection of the body. I do not take account of the article on Christ's descent into hell, or Hades, since this is not everywhere received. It would surely be easy to point out that this article has no claim to be considered an essential of Christian belief.

The first of the three articles mentioned cannot be regarded as an essential of Christian belief, because it is neither mentioned nor implied in the teaching of Jesus. Jesus claimed to be without sin, but never intimated that his sinlessness was due to a supernatural origin of his person. He taught that he was one with God, but also that this unity was morally conditioned. He said that the Father loved him and was with him, because he always did what pleased the Father. He said that he abode in the Father's love, because he kept the Father's commandments. He teaches, in the plainest manner, that his union with the Father is ethical when he prays that his *disciples* may become one even as he and the Father are one. Again, Jesus presented himself as the Messiah of the Old Testament, but there is no indication that, in his thought, this involved a supernatural human origin. Apart from three passages in the fourth gospel, there is no indication that, in the thought of Jesus, his Messiahship implied preëxistence even, not to say a supernatural human origin. We repeat, then, the statement made above, that the article regarding the conception and birth of Jesus cannot be regarded as an essential of Christian belief, because the teaching of Jesus neither mentions nor implies it. We are not now concerned with the question whether the narratives in Matthew and Luke regarding the birth of Jesus are historical or poetical. However that question may be answered, even if they be regarded as historical, it remains true that the article on the birth of Jesus cannot be regarded as an *essential* of Christian belief. If Jesus had regarded it as essential, it is inconceivable that he should never have so much as alluded to it. For everyone, therefore, who holds that the essentials of Christian belief are contained in the teaching of Jesus, the question admits of no debate. This article is not contained in his teaching, not even by implication.

In regard to the second of the three articles, that Jesus shall come to judge the quick and the dead, one cannot speak as positively as on the first, and yet, as the article reads, it cannot be regarded as an essential of Christian belief. For the judgment of which it speaks is evidently thought of as a judgment of all at one definite time in the future, both the living and the dead. This contains at least two points of divergence from the teaching of Jesus. First, Jesus does not teach that the judgment of men is to be postponed until his coming, or the end of this present age; and, second, he does not teach that the judgment is to be an outward and visible event. That which can be regarded as an essential of Christian belief is that all men shall be judged by Jesus Christ, but this is not what the creed says. It says that Christ shall come from the right hand of the Father to judge the quick and the dead. This statement that he shall *come* doubtless means that he shall come to this earth, where the judgment is accordingly thought of as taking place in a formal and visible manner; and the coming is, of course, identified with the coming of Christ at the end of the age. There is no other event in the gospel of which the builders of this creed can have thought.

But Jesus does not teach that the judgment of all men is to be at the end of the age. According to the fourth gospel, the essential judgment of righteous and unrighteous is during the present life. He who accepts Jesus passes out of death into life (John 5 : 24) and at death is received by the Lord into the Father's house (John 14 : 3). He does not come into judgment (John 5 : 24). On the other hand, he that believeth not in the Messiah hath been judged already (John 3 : 18). Hence, in the thought of this gospel, any judgment at death or at any time in the future can be no more than a recognition or indorsement of the judgment of the present life. In the synoptists also judgment is a *process*. It is true that these writers put a great judgment scene at the end of the age, but they do not think of the essential truth of that scene as *limited* to the end of the age. For in no passage regarding the so-called final judgment, as far as the words of Jesus are concerned, is there the slightest intimation

that it concerns more than a single generation, that is, the generation which is then on the earth. Therefore we must hold that the truth of the scene has already had its realization with each generation and with every individual member of each generation. This is taught, also, in the word of Jesus to the dying robber: "This day shalt thou be with me in paradise." To be in paradise with Christ cannot be regarded as different from the reward which is bestowed on the righteous at the final judgment. Paradise means heaven, both in the early Jewish and in the Christian writings. But to be in heaven with Christ presupposes the Messianic judgment. Nor can the case of this robber be regarded as exceptional. Had John or Peter or any other disciple died in that hour, trusting in Jesus as did the robber, we must suppose that he would have been in paradise immediately after death, and consequently must suppose that for him the final judgment would have been accomplished in that same hour. Therefore, according to the synoptists, the final judgment of the individual is at the close of the earthly life. It is not far hence in the future, at the end of the present dispensation. There is no interval between death and judgment. The conception of the creed, that there shall be a judgment both of the living and the dead, that is, a judgment scene in which those who are yet in the body and the dead who have been raised from the grave shall be judged together, is wholly foreign to the teaching of Jesus. We must say, then, that, while judgment by Jesus is an essential of Christian belief, the statement of the creed that Christ shall come from the right hand of the Father to judge the quick and the dead cannot be maintained.

The third article which we think has against it the teaching of Jesus is that which confesses belief in the resurrection of the body. Jesus taught that his own resurrection would be a visible phenomenon, a bodily return from the grave, but he taught also that this resurrection was to be a *sign* of his Messiahship. Therefore it belonged in the same class with his Messianic words and works. It does not then prophesy a bodily resurrection for the disciples of Jesus, but is a strong argument against such a resurrection. The miraculous occurrence which was necessary

in the case of Jesus can never be necessary in the case of another being. We can no more argue from the bodily resurrection of Jesus to a bodily resurrection for his disciples than we can argue that, because he arose on the third day, therefore we shall arise on the third day, or because he raised the dead to life, we also can. Raising the dead was a proof of Messiahship, and the resurrection of Jesus was the culminating proof of the same fact.

In the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus Jesus represents Lazarus as passing into heaven in the moment of death, for *the bosom of Abraham* is here a synonym of heaven; and he assured the penitent robber that he should be in paradise that day. But to be in the bosom of Abraham or paradise is certainly to be risen from the dead. Therefore, these passages, like the resurrection of Jesus himself, are directly against the idea of the resurrection of the body. The day when the robber entered paradise, in such a spiritual body as it pleased God to give, his material body was taken down from the cross, and found the usual fate of the bodies of executed criminals.

In the fourth gospel Jesus makes no reference to a resurrection of the body, or to a future resurrection of any sort, if we except a single passage in which the resurrection is not treated for its own sake, but incidentally (John 5:28, 29). He speaks only of a present spiritual resurrection. This is unto a life which is not affected by the collapse of the physical body.

We conclude, then, that the article regarding the resurrection of the body not only has no clear word of Jesus in its support, but is manifestly opposed to his teaching. It cannot, therefore, be regarded as an essential of Christian belief.

Such are the omissions which must be made from the so-called Apostles' Creed, if it is to be brought into harmony with the teaching of Jesus. But this is only a part of the needful revision, and, indeed, the smaller part. When one looks into this ancient "rule of faith" for the prominent truths of Jesus' teaching, one looks for the most part in vain. They are not there.

Thus the first article confesses faith in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth. Now, with the exception of one word, there is nothing distinctly Christian<sup>1</sup> in this article. It might have been the confession of an Old Testament saint as well as of a disciple of Jesus. It surely does not adequately represent the revelation of the Father which Jesus brought to the world. And yet, that revelation was fundamental in his entire thought. His consciousness of God was the sun, which lighted all his day. To ignore this revelation so largely as the creed does is to fall far short of an ideal Christian rule of faith.

The section regarding Jesus, if we omit the article concerning his origin and that about his coming to judge the quick and the dead, is true, but it scarcely touches the *revelation* of Jesus at all. It mentions that he suffered under Pontius Pilate, but does not say that he was the Messiah and Savior. It mentions his crucifixion and death, but does not refer to his perfect life and his revelation of the Father. It mentions his burial and resurrection, but does not say that he founded the kingdom of heaven on earth. It mentions his ascension into heaven and his session at God's right hand, but says nothing of his vital relation to his disciples. These omitted truths are fundamental and must surely find a place in a statement of the essentials of Christian belief.

The third section of the creed, "I believe in the Holy Ghost," does not remind us of any specific teaching of Christ in regard to the Spirit. It might have been confessed by David or Isaiah.

The fourth section mentions the holy catholic church and the communion of saints. The first part of this article does not seem to present an essential of Christian belief. It is extremely doubtful whether Jesus ever used the word *church*, and if he did use it in the two passages in which Matthew attributes it to him, it is certain that he did not use it in the sense which it had in the fifth century when this article came into the creed. We must substitute for it the word *kingdom*,

<sup>1</sup> By *Christian* here I mean that which belongs to the revelation of Jesus.



and then we should have something distinctly *Christian* affirmed of this kingdom. For the Old Testament also speaks of the kingdom of Jehovah, and teaches that his people should be holy.

The second part of this section mentions the communion of saints, but perhaps it would have more of a flavor of the teaching of Jesus if it mentioned the saints' duty of service and sacrifice.

In regard to the article on the forgiveness of sin it must be said that there is nothing distinctively Christian in it, that is, nothing which bears the stamp of Jesus' teaching. Many peoples in different ages have believed in the forgiveness of sins. Some have thought that forgiveness was to be secured in one way, some in another. But it is reasonable to demand that a statement which claims to give the essentials of *Christian* belief shall go beyond the common faith of many ethnic religions.

Such are some of the points at which the so-called Apostles' Creed must receive important additions, if it is to deserve the name of the "rule of faith." It may not be an easy task to present these additions in a form which will be generally acceptable; and yet, in view of the vast progress which has been made in the knowledge of the gospels since the creed was formulated, especially the progress of this century, it ought not to be difficult to make a statement which should at once commend itself to all competent judges as a more adequate representation of the essentials of Christian belief than is this venerable creed.

In concluding this article I venture to embody the suggestions which have been made in a version of the Apostles' Creed as revised by the teaching of Jesus:

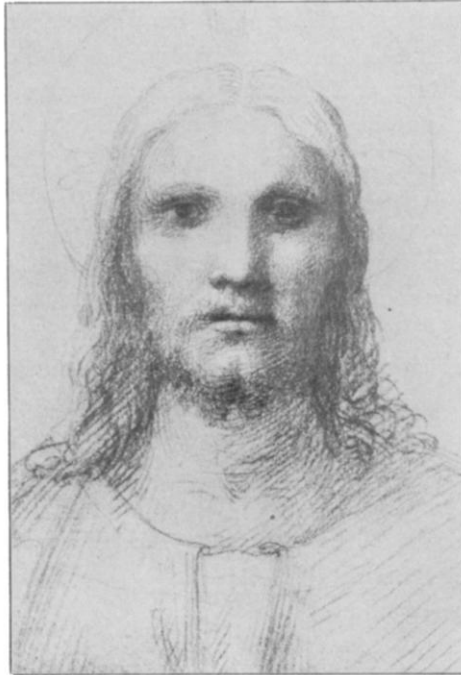
I believe in God as the Father of all men, who so loved the world that He gave His Son to die for it, and who freely pardons every penitent sinner.

I believe in Jesus as the Messiah and Savior of the world; who lived a perfect life of trust, obedience, and love; who in His character and teaching gave a perfect revelation of the will of God; who founded the kingdom of heaven upon the earth; who was glorified by the Father in His death and resurrection; who sitteth at the right hand of the Father, and who is also in vital spiritual connection with His disciples on the earth.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, who takes the place of Jesus with His disciples, who shows unto us the things of Jesus, and inspires to Christian service.

I believe in the holy kingdom of Jesus, entered through faith in Him, manifest wherever His spirit is manifest, extended by personal witness to Jesus, triumphant and everlasting.

I believe in the forgiveness of sins through Jesus, the life of consecration to the will of Jesus, the reception of believers by Jesus in the hour of death, and their perfect felicity in the perfected kingdom of God the Father.



SKETCH OF THE HEAD OF CHRIST  
RAFFAELINO DEL GARBO